

BLUES & RHYTHM



Juke Boy Bonner

The Alligator
Records Story
Part
Two



Blind
Blake



In retrospect, it seems inevitable that Jones would hit pay dirt sometime; his plaintive and emotional voice is surely one of the greatest in the genre, in my opinion certainly the greatest since Hank Williams; he could tackle weepers, ballads and honky-tonkers with equal aplomb, and even rockabilly, a genre that he allegedly disliked. Such was his ability that he recorded two seminal rockabilly recordings under the pseudonym of Thumper Jones (neither Jones or Pappy Daily wanted to alienate pure country fans), 'How Come It' and 'Rock It', though the tremendous guitar work from Hal Harris certainly helped here. Even country gospel recordings such as 'Tag Along' have a strong rockabilly edge.

As an effort to acquire greater distribution for Starday, Pappy Daily entered an agreement with Mercury in 1956 and for a short while Jones' releases appeared on a joint Mercury-Starday label, but soon his output had reverted to Mercury only and eventually Daily and Jones left Starday to Don Pierce, and both joined Mercury itself. Jones probably didn't record any more rockabilly *per se*, but his country was generally excellent and frequently up-tempo and with his hits 'Who Shot Sam' and 'White Lightning' (both included here) he must have recorded the two nearest to rockabilly non-rockabilly recordings ever produced – great up-tempo hillbilly. In short, with Dave Penny's usually informative notes and discographical details in a sixteen page booklet, there can surely not have been a better compilation of Jones' earlier recordings than this Fantastic Voyage release, well recommended.

Byron Foulger

CROSSROADS IN COWTOWN – Hillbilly, Swing, Boogie And Western Pop For The Hardwood Dancefloor

Fantastic Voyage FVCD101 (57:41)

As the title says this 24 tracker features an array of country styles based around the state of California with sides waxed in the 1950s. This time rather than the rawer sound of some country styles, included here are sides featuring big band jazz, some with more than a hint of 1950s pop music – such as on Arlie Duff's 'Lie Detector' – complete with the Anita Kerr Singers from 1955 and Eddy Arnold's duet with Jaye P. Morgan on 'Do You Love Me' from 1957.

Many of the artists here will be well known and their sides are at the pop and jazzier end of the spectrum such as Tennessee Ernie Ford's 'Kiss Me Big', which features steel guitar and clarinet.

R&B crossovers are featured courtesy of Hank Penny's original version of Wynonie Harris' r&b hit 'Bloodshot Eyes' while the then popular rumba craze gets a look in with Spade Cooley's 'Rumba Boogie'. Cliffie Stone delivers proto rock 'n' roll on the honking 'Barracuda' and big band jazz comes via Cooley again on 'Hillbilly Fever'.

No compilation of this nature would be complete without Bob Wills, whose 'Cadillac In A Model A' was issued in 1954 on MGM. Pee Wee King delivers some fine boogie and rockabilly on 'Catty Town' and the Nettle Sisters perform some excellent 'sisterbilly' on 'Real Gone Jive'.

Country stalwarts such as Red Foley, (with Roberta Lee), Hawkshaw Hawkins and Merle Travis are present as are lesser-known lights such as Bob Newman – who performs the great 'Hangover Boogie'. There are also sides from lesser lights such as Lee Bonds, Tom Tall, and Nita, Rita and Ruby but they are all pretty good.

Possibly something of an acquired taste but some great records nonetheless. Good booklet notes by 'Shufflin' Sexton', memorabilia, label shots and discography make for an interesting release.

Tony Burke

HONKY TONKIN' – 87 TRACKS FROM THE GOLDEN YEARS OF COUNTRY MUSIC

Fantastic Voyage FVTD 114 (Three CDs: 75:19; 76:50; 75:40)

Honky Tonks were the poor white folks' equivalent of the black folks' juke joints. Dave Penny's notes point out that the venerable Oxford English Dictionary says they are a 'low class bar situated in a rural area in the southern states of the USA'. The term was derived from joints called 'honk-a-tonk' – in 1885 the notorious Dodge City was described as a 'honkatonk town'.

Derogatory or not by the 1930s these rural cafés and bars provided entertainment and dancing and a distinct country music sound – a stripped down, loping, raw sound played mainly by small piano, fiddle and guitar groups.

During the 1940s artists such as Ernest Tubbs, Moon Mullican, Ray Price, Lefty Frizzell and George Jones defined the style. This is music designed for dancing and drinking beer to – the original 'tear in my beer', 'drownin' your sorrows' music, populated by honky tonk angels, melancholic vocalists who had made inexplicable, never to be repeated, mistakes by cheatin' on a good woman, as well as cheatin' women cheatin' on good men and women who gave up their families to hang around the bright lights and drink beer – yep all life is here and it's all good stuff.

Split across three CDs there is a fantastic array of artists kicking off on CD one – 'The Wild Side Of Life' with Jimmie Davis and Brown's Musical Brownie's on 'Honky Tonk Blues' from 1937 released by Decca,

with an answer disc by Al Dexter from a year later. Ernest Tubbs' classic 'Walkin' The Floor Over You' again for Decca from 1941 is included as are great early tracks from Art Gibson, the wonderful Billy Hughes who is totally candid about the dangers of drug dependency on 'Cocaine Blues' from 1947, Hank Williams, Floyd Tillman's 'Slippin' Around', Hawkshaw Hawkins, Hank Snow, Moon Mullican and ending with the Maddox Brothers and Rose on the great 'George's Playhouse Boogie' issued by 4Star in 1949.

Disc two – 'A Six Pack To Go' has thirty sides about boozing, men breathing hard on young women, and folks having a durn good time – with a tinge of regret and the occasional moral lecture – notably on Jean Shepard's 'Girl's In Disgrace', Sonny Burns' 'Another Woman Looking For A Man', Webb Pierce's version of 'He's In The Jailhouse Now' and Ray Price's classic 'Crazy Arms' and the newly rediscovered (since Laura Cantrell cut an albums worth of her songs) Kitty Wells' 'It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels'.

Finally on the third set – 'Out Of Control' there is more boozing, heartache, regret and fallen women – such as on Charlie Walker's 'Who Will Buy The Wine', Carl Perkins' 'Let The Juke Box Keep Playing', Loretta Lynn's 'Honky Tonk Gal' and Billy Montana sums it all up with 'You're More At Home In A Honky Tonk' from 1959.

This last disc has more polished sides including Jerry Lee Lewis on fine form on Hank Williams' 'You Win Again' from 1957 and Wanda Jackson's great version of 'Silver Threads And Golden Needles' from 1956, and takes us as far as 1960 with sides by Buck Owens, Dolly Parton, George Jones and Johnny Paycheck.

With a detailed booklet, memorabilia, label shots and full discography – if you are looking to discover Honky Tonk music this is the one to get. This is the definitive set and should not be missed.

Tony Burke

TOM MINDTE & JEREMY STEPHENS: Radio Favourites & Sacred Songs

Patuxent CD 215 (30:27)

Tom Mindte plays mandolin and Jeremy Stephens plays guitar, they sing in close harmony, and you think immediately of some of the classic duos who made history with exactly the same combination – the Monroe Brothers, of course, the Blue Sky Boys, The Armstrong Twins. And as you listen, you think how faithfully they reflect that tradition without making it sound the slightest bit old and stale. Mindte is a fine player, unflashy yet sure in his touch and rich in his tone, and Stephens plays the kind of flatpicked chordal accompaniment that's just right for the job. The harmonies are spot on. The material is a mixture of sacred songs like 'On The Jericho Road', traditional ballads – 'It Rained A Mist' is a version of the ancient Child ballad 'Little Sir Hugh', fortunately purged of any trace of its anti-Semitic origins – and songs from the older country repertoire, like Bill Cox's 'Sparkling Brown Eyes' and Charlie Monroe's 'What Is Home Without Love?'.

I would make no outlandish claims for this album, but in its own quiet way, it delivers much – fine old music, attractively arranged, played and sung with authentic expertise and manifest affection.

Ray Templeton

★ The LAST Writes ★

SANDY CARROLL: Just As I Am

Catfood Records CFR-011 (39:01)

This is singer/songwriter Sandy Carroll's debut for Catfood Records. Husband Jim Gaines produced and the set was recorded in Stantonville, Tennessee. All the material is original, penned, or co-penned by Carroll. She is a fine singer, capable of handling a gospel tinged number like 'Blessed Be', or the slightly tongue-in-cheek humorous piece 'Mother Nature' on the efficacious effects of Botox!

'Heartfixin' Man' is a tough blues groove with a rock tinge, 'Romeo And Juliet' a pretty ballad with accordion giving it a Tex-Mex groove, while 'Messin' With Me' is a funky groove that reminds me a little of Leon Russell. 'Just As I Am' was co-written with James Solberg and Luther Allison; Luther cut it on his 'Reckless' album (produced by Jim Gaines) so the wheel has come full circle.

Sandy Carroll is a new name to me, and I am seriously impressed with this lady, a fine singer and songwriter (and no slouch on the piano either). If you are familiar with her previous releases this CD will not disappoint.

Phil Wight

RON HACKER AND THE HACKSAWS: Filthy Animal

WTB 1001 (49:33)

Ron Hacker has been described as 'San Francisco's white trash blues icon', and this protégé of Yank Rachell has been around since the '70s. He plays loud and mean slide guitar for the most part, and his vocals are